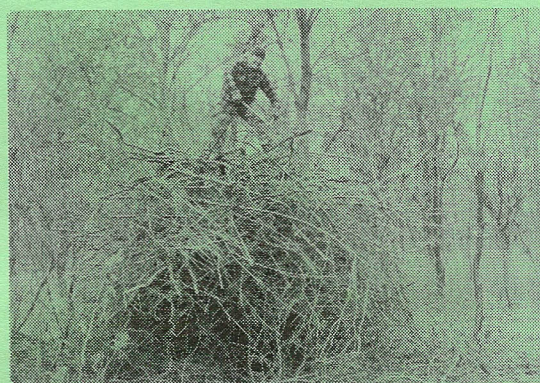


Brush Piles



NBPP's Refrigerator Door Companion

Winter 1995-96

PEOPLE AND PLACES

North Branch Volunteer Barbara Sutcliffe will be reporting on our sites and their stewards for Brush Piles. For this issue, she interviewed Stewards Bob Bluestone and Gladys Bryer. They are apprentices and together manage Wayside/Railroad Prairies

BOB BLUESTONE AT WAYSIDE PRAIRIE

Bob Bluestone went to college with North Branch old-timer "Brushmeister" Brian Seinfeld, apprentice steward at Harms Woods. "We go backpacking in the summers and we're both into the outdoors. He went on a North Branch nature tour in Skokie, and he got excited about the Prairie Project, and he bugged me for about a year and I came out." That was in 1992.

Six months later Bob became an apprentice at Wayside. "I kept showing up every Sunday, and they kept asking me to do more. One day I was giving Steve Packard and Karen Holland a ride home for the State of the Prairies lectures, and they asked me to be Apprentice Steward. I fought them on it as long as I could, and they convinced me I could do it.

Wayside Prairie is in the Cook County Forest Preserves and contains 17 acres. "The site was in pretty good condition when I first started, with some good diversity there. It was getting a little overgrown by brush on the sides. A long time ago there used to be a softball diamond in the middle of it. We get a burn in about once a year. We don't burn the whole site at once, we're trying to get the open savanna to burn a bit. It doesn't have good fuel yet."

Bluestone reports that, "...a good diverse group of people come out for Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon workdays. School kids come out on nonwork days."

People problems are a continuing concern. "We have people that come in and dig up young oak trees. The picnickers sometimes drag the logs that we've put down to control where the FP mows and make a bonfire out of them." Although there are large numbers of deer on the site, they don't seem to be too much trouble.

When asked what his biggest accomplishments are, Bob said, "We stopped the mowing underneath a sentinel burr oak that's growing at Wayside and is part of the open savanna.

GLADYS BRYER AT RAILROAD PRAIRIE

Gladys Bryer read an article in the *Reader* about the Prairie Project and clipped it out. On Earth Day 1990, she picked up the work schedule and some material in Lincoln Park and Gladys and husband Hy started going to work days.

"We were picking garlic mustard at Somme our first day out, and we just started coming every Sunday. I really liked it; my husband did, too. One day we were cutting brush and clearing the railroad track at Railroad Prairie, which is now part of Wayside/Railroad, and Bev Hansen suggested I become a steward. She gave me the Balabans' number to call. Not much had been done at RR; it was this beautiful pristine prairie that had never been planted—it was a natural prairie. It's very small, about 3 acres, along the river. Very little had been done at this site, because it didn't have a steward. So I pursued that and that's how I became steward."

"In ecological terms, we've had wonderful accomplishments!" They have done several burns since Gladys became steward. "We've burned the savanna just south of RR, which I don't think had ever been burned. It's going to be a show place. It enlarges the site. Between Wayside, the RR, and the area we've opened up, the site will be about 30-40 acres—now we're talking!"

According to Gladys the Railroad section is "just fabulous God-given prairie. Nothing had been done with it except build a railroad on it. All the seeds from the RR section have migrated into the other section and it's really hard to see a dividing line now. There are some wonderful rare plants on both sides and it's just this little postage stamp prairie that's unbelievable. It's going to be one of our showplaces and I'm very excited about it."

"Wayside in the five years I've worked it is a big open prairie. When I first saw it there was a great big stand of cherry

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BOB BLUESTONE

Continued from page 1

We've cleared a lot of brush from the center of the prairie. We're starting to do restoration work on the closed savanna, doing oak tree rescue. The Forest Preserve district is cutting out all the silver poplars that are growing there and shading out the ancient swamp white oaks and hickories. We got rid of most of the adult white or silver poplar and all the black locust. It feels great to get things done. We're winning the fight with white sweet clover."

Barbara asked, "What gives you the most satisfaction about doing restoration work?" "I feel great. I really think I'm making a difference. I don't have the time or the money or the resources to get between a whale and a harpoon with Greenpeace, but I can save endangered species right here in Chicago. And I work very closely with Gladys Bryer who is the Apprentice Steward at Railroad. We're doing this together which is a big help because she likes doing paperwork."



GLADYS BRYER

Continued from page 1

trees out in the middle and now they're all gone, we did a lot of clearing. It's real pretty. Before I started there, there had been a ballpark right in the middle of the prairie. You can't even see where it was now, it's all gone.

The first priority is to protect the sites from human depredation. For example, "the railroad was laying new foundation for the track. A machine would scoop up the old foundation and spew it out all over the prairie. I found out they were going to do this construction work, and we were able to get them to spew the old foundation to the west of the track rather than in the prairie. I didn't believe they would know what the prairie was, so on the first day of the construction my husband and I stood in the middle of the tracks and yelled, 'Stop!' It was unbelievable. If we hadn't been there, the prairie would be a mess. We were out there day and night protecting it. Anyway, they finally got the fence up to protect the area."

That's also part of the stewards job! These places need to be looked after, because they're so fragile and an uneducated eye will look at a prairie and not see anything. That's our job, to protect these places."

Photo by Gladys Bryer

Over 100 neighbors and friends showed up at Wayside/Railroad Prairie Festival on a blustery October day for storytelling, prairie tours, squeezing fresh apple juice, and for dancing. Karen Laner organized the successful event.

NEW YEAR'S THOUGHTS

Shortly before his death, John Muir chronicled his thoughts in a book entitled *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*. In it, he recalls his boyhood and reflects on those experiences that shaped his life-long endeavor to protect wild places. Muir wrote:

Saving bits of pure wilderness was a fond, favorite notion of mine long before I heard of national parks. When my father came from Scotland, he settled in a fine region of Wisconsin, beside a small glacier lake bordered with white pond lilies. And on the north side of the lake, just below our house, there was a carex meadow full of charming flowers.

And when I was about to wander away on my long rambles, I was sorry to leave the precious meadow unprotected; therefore I said to my brother-in-law,

who by then owned it, "Sell me the 40 acres of lake meadow, and keep it fenced and never allow the cattle or hogs to break into it, and I will gladly pay you whatever you say. I want to keep it untrampled for the sake of its ferns and flowers, and even if I should never see it again, the beauty of its lilies and orchards is so pressed into my mind, I shall always enjoy looking back at them in imagination, even across seas and continents, and perhaps after I am dead."

It is not surprising then, that many who volunteer in natural areas across the Chicagoland region, have also felt their souls stirred by the charming grace and beauty of these "bits of pure wilderness."

Submitted by Steve Byers, Illinois Nature Preserves Commission

BOOK REVIEW

Nancy Freehafer

Cabin Fever, by Chicago area writer and North Branch Prairie Project volunteer Richard Carter, is a collection of essays reflecting a personal quest to reestablish ties with Nature. As Carter emphasizes throughout the book, "We cannot live fully if separated from nature."

Carter spends his summers at a cottage in Door County, where he writes of the tiny cabin in the woods that he built for himself. He recounts memorable encounters with deer, foxes, bats and herons. He tells of kayaking in the midst of migrating cormorants, "for awhile, I had joined the migration, felt my blood surge, caught the exuberance of their movement." And he describes himself as a "Trash Hawk."

I saw beauty spoiled by the careless toss of an empty can, and another, and another. My rage inflamed me. Changed me. I began to snatch up cans, crush them. Carry them off. My appetite grew and grew. First from a can or two, then bottles. Wrappers. Plastic. Papers. Rags, Hubcaps. Trim. All became grist for my craw. I became this voracious black-feathered *thing*...

But the essays about the Chicago area should be of great interest to North Branch readers. There are essays about kayaking the Des Plaines River and the Skokie Lagoon. And one essay tells of Carter meeting his animal totem, the fox, in Harms Woods.

The themes in *Cabin Fever*—the search for personal meaning, the effort to reestablish a connection with nature, the anger and alienation from a society that is carelessly destroying its home—should be familiar to many North Branchers. As Carter says about the Skokie Lagoon,

This drastically altered, befouled little piece of nature is perhaps the best we can do for the moment, given where we are. Maybe such a place can become a crack...that opens up a vision to something better, richer, deeper, more pure. If it has been our destiny to modify our landscapes so drastically, perhaps we can relent and find a way to work with nature to return something of what we so foolishly drove away...We can surrender some of our arrogance and be willing to learn from nature, that master teacher.

The book is a good read, poetic and thoughtful, made even better by pencil illustrations by artist Carolyn Kenney.

Cabin Fever is published by Galde Press (St. Paul) and, according to Richard Carter, is available at many local bookstores.

Happy Holidays

Permit Holder:
The Nature Conservancy
8 S. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60603

North Branch Prairie Project
P.O. Box 74
Northbrook, IL 60065

ADDRESS CORRECTION
REQUESTED

*The North Branch
Prairie Project is
a cooperative effort
involving The Nature
Conservancy, the
Chicago Audubon
Society, and the Sierra
Club, Chicago Group.*

*We manage these sites
as volunteers for the
Forest Preserve District
of Cook County and
the Volunteer
Stewardship Network.*

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 6632
Northbrook, Illinois

NORTH BRANCH PRAIRIE PROJECT WINTER WORKDAYS AND ACTIVITIES SCHEDULE

The NORTH BRANCH PRAIRIE PROJECT is working to restore and manage the few remaining prairie and oak savanna remnants along the North Branch of the Chicago River in the Cook County Forest Preserves. These areas, once part of a vast grassland ecosystem, are under tremendous pressure from urban development and non-native species. We are working to restore conditions that will allow these natural

wild communities to flourish as a permanent part of the metropolitan area.

In the winter we cut brush. Always dress for the weather and bring some water. Sun protection is important. When it is cold we may go out to lunch. The workday hotline is 312/878-3877.

WINTER 1995/1996

December 3	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Miami Woods Prairie
December 3	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	Somme Prairie Grove
December 10	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Somme Prairie Grove
December 16	Saturday	9:30 a.m.	<i>Watersmeet</i>
December 17	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Bunker Hill Prairie
December 17	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	Bunker Hill Prairie
December 31	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Somme Woods
January 7	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Bunker Hill Prairie
January 7	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	Bunker Hill Prairie
January 13	Saturday	9:00 a.m.	<i>Oxbow Prairie (Bunker Hill)</i>
January 14	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Somme Nature Preserve
January 14	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	Somme Prairie Grove
January 15	Monday	7:30 p.m.	Book Group
January 20	Saturday	9:30 a.m.	<i>Watersmeet</i>
January 20	Saturday	6:00 p.m.	Annual Potluck
January 21	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Sauganash Prairie Grove
January 28	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Harms Woods
January 29	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	Harms Woods
February 3	Saturday	9:30 a.m.	<i>Watersmeet</i>
February 4	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Bunker Hill Prairie
February 4	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	Bunker Hill Prairie
February 6	Tuesday	7:00 p.m.	Women of the North Branch
February 10	Saturday	9:00 a.m.	<i>Oxbow Prairie (Bunker Hill)</i>
February 11	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Harms Woods
February 11	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	Harms Woods
February 12	Monday	7:30 p.m.	Book Group
February 18	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Somme Woods
February 18	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	Somme Prairie Grove
February 24	Saturday	9:30 a.m.	<i>Watersmeet</i>
February 25	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Harms Flatwoods

Directions

BUNKER HILL/OXBOW (Chicago)—Meet at the Bunker Hill Forest Preserve parking lot on the west side of Caldwell Ave. about 1/4 mile north of Devon Ave.

EMILY OAKS NATURE CENTER (Skokie)—From intersection of Skokie Blvd. and Howard St., go east on Howard to first residential street, Knox. Go north on Knox to Brummel. Turn left on Brummel and go one block to Nature Center parking lot.

NORTH BRANCH WORKGROUPS

The North Branch workgroups listed below need volunteers. Contact the chairperson for more information or attend a workgroup meeting.

Ecological Management

Jane and John Balaban, 708/679-4289.

Education/Volunteer Development:

Joanne Softcheck, 312/878-3877

Publications/Publicity:

Karen Holland, 312/929-7658.

Science:

Drew Ullberg, 708/304-6972

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ANNUAL POTLUCK DINNER

North Branch Prairie Project's annual celebration will be held on January 20 at the Edgebrook Community Center, 6100 N. Central. Everyone is welcome. Come at 6:00 p.m. and bring a dish and beverage to share. Recent North Branch slides and photographs will add to the festivities, so bring some—and your musical instruments, too. We'll kick off introductions by the workgroup leaders and end by acknowledging some special volunteers.

READING GROUP

You do not have to be regular to attend the North Branch Reading Group; just join us when you can.

On November 16, participants will bring copies of their favorite works to read aloud and pass around. Remember, all of you are welcome. This is a great way to get to know each other and share ideas.

On January 15, we will discuss *Crossing the Next Meridian*, by Charles Wilkenon. Tom Murphy will lead the discussion and will focus on the chapters relating to "Grazing" and "Water."

Barry Lopez' *Crossing Open Ground* is the February 12 selection. Mary Lou Mrozynski will lead the discussion

GLENBROOK HIGH SCHOOL (Northbrook)—North of Willow Rd. on the west side of Shermer Road. Enter the parking lot at the north driveway and park by the tennis courts.

HARMS FLATWOODS (Glenview)—Meet at Forest Preserve Grove parking lot on the west side of Harms Rd., just south of Old Orchard Rd.

HARMS WOODS (Glenview)—Meet at Forest Preserve Grove parking lot on the west side of Harms Rd., just south of Glenview Rd.

MIAMI-INDIGO (Morton Grove-Niles)—Meet at Miami Woods Prairie Forest Preserve parking lot on the east side of Caldwell Ave., two blocks north of Oakton Ave.

PERKINS WOODS (Evanston)—From I94 exit at Old Orchard Rd., east to Crawford St., south on Crawford to Grant St., east on Grant to Ewing St., site is at the corner of Grant and Ewing.

SAUGANASH PRAIRIE (Chicago)—Meet at the edge of the Forest Preserve along the south side of Bryn Mawr Ave. at Kilbourn Ave. (south of Peterson Ave. and east of Cicero Ave.)

SOMME NATURE PRESERVE (Northbrook)—Meet in the Post Office parking lot, Dundee and Western Avenues.

SOMME PRAIRIE GROVE, WOODS, AND SEDGE MEADOW (Northbrook)—Take Dundee Rd. two miles west from the Edens Expressway to Waukegan Rd. Go north a few hundred feet on Waukegan and meet at the unpaved parking area on the west side of the road.

WATERSMEET/SKOKIE SEDGE MEADOWS (Northfield)—Exit the Edens Expressway at Lake Avenue West. Go west to Wagner Rd., turn north then take Wagner to Winnetka Rd. Go east on Winnetka 3/4 mile. Park on the south side of the street.

WAYSIDE/RR PRAIRIE (Morton Grove)—Meet at Wayside Woods Prairie Forest Preserve parking lot on Lehigh Ave. (a few blocks east of Waukegan Rd. and just north of Dempster Ave.)

BUFFALO GROVE PRAIRIE WINTER WORKDAY SCHEDULE

The Guardians are volunteers working to restore the native Illinois prairie near Lake-Cook Road. We invite you to join us when we eliminate weeds, collect seeds and the ever popular brush-cutting. Dress for the weather and bring sun protection. Tools, camaraderie, homemade snacks and beverages will be provided.

All work days are on Sundays from 9:00 a.m. to noon.
December 3 • January 14 • February 11

DIRECTIONS: Take Lake-Cook Road to Hastings Road (one street west of railroad overpass and one mile west of Milwaukee Avenue.) Turn north on Hastings into the second lot on the right (one lot past the Computer Discount Warehouse.) Park at east end of the lot nearest the prairie.

QUESTIONS: Call 708/677-7001 (daytime) or 708/520-5822 (evenings) with questions. Ask for Lee.

We meet at 7:30 p.m. Please call Nancy Freehafer at 312/342-6665 or Barbara Rose at 312/248-4817 for directions.

WOMEN OF THE NORTH BRANCH

Great food and great conversation are the norm when women get together. Join us for our next potluck on February 6 at 7:00 p.m. at the home of Barbara Rose. Call Barbara at 312/248-4817 or Nancy at 312/342-6665 for directions and parking advice. Are you a woman and a NBPP volunteer? You are invited!

MIGHTY ACORNS NEEDS VOLUNTEERS

...to lead small groups of children in stewardship activities. Skilled adults are needed to teach and help with brush pile building. Children need instruction in proper construction, and help in getting the brush up on the pile a la Brushmeister Brian! Call Justine Kusner, 708/825-3835, or Diane Reckless at The Nature Conservancy, 312/346-8166 for time and dates.

PLANTS OF THE CHICAGO REGION

The new Swink & Wilhelm is available to North Branchers at a substantial discount. Call Jane Balaban at 708/679-4289.

THE TOP TEN REASONS YOU KNOW YOU'RE A PLANT NERD

10. You respond "oh, goodie" when told to collect Indian grass.
9. Obedient plants obey you.
8. You ask, "yes, but *which* goldenrod is it?"
7. You have a copy of the new Swink and Wilhelm.
6. Your family begs you to speak English, not Latin.
5. You know the meaning of "rat pin."
4. You can identify a grass from a car moving 65 mph.
3. You go shopping to collect bags for seeds, not groceries.
2. You don't need to label your seed bags.
1. You pick up a single seed from your living room floor and correctly identify its plant (and its site.)

*Submitted by two novice nerds and one notable nerd
(Karen Laner, Laurel Ross, Bob Bluestone)*

To contribute to *Brush Piles*.

Your photos and cartoons would look great on these pages. Your features, anecdotes, essays, announcements, requests, poems, comments, and letters are also welcome. To discuss your ideas, call Barbara Rose, 312/248-4817 *before* the deadline. Deadline for the Spring 1996 issue is **February 1** (for March, April, May).

Brush Piles Crew

Editing: Leslie Borns, Barbara Rose, Joanne Softcheck, Barbara Sutcliffe
Layout/Production: Kathy and Chuck Lapinsky